

DICKS' STANDARD PLAYS.

A CLOSE SIEGE.

BY GEORGE DANCE.



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A CLOSE SIEGE.

A SERIO-COMIC DRAMA, IN ONE ACT.

BY GEORGE DANCE.

First performed at the St. James's Theatre, 1839.



Dramatis Personæ.

[See page 9.]

EARL OF CHESTERFIELD (Governor of Lichfield Close)	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. Tilbury.
GEORGE STANHOPE (his Son)	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. King.
LIEUTENANT EVERARD (of the Royalist Army)	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. Brindal.
GILBERT ARKWRIGHT (a weaver, and soldier in the Parliamentary Forces)	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. Baker.
MABEL HARROWDEN (an Orphan—betrothed to Gilbert)	...	...	...	...	...	Mrs. Franks.
Soldiers of both Parties, Peasants, &c.						

The Scene is laid at Lichfield, in 1643.

TIME IN REPRESENTATION.—Forty-five Minutes.

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London: J. DICKS, 313, Strand. All Booksellers.

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C O S T U M E .

THE EARL OF CHESTERFIELD.—Grey bald natural wig, with tuft on ehin, sugar-loaf hat with dark feather, full eloak, eane, heavy rich old English shape, and trunks, russet boots, heavy tops.

GEORGE STANHOPE.—Shape of crimson and gold, white pantaloons, russet boots, jewelled loop, black sugarloaf hat, white feathers.

EVERARD.—Blue handsome shape.

GILBERT.—A jerkin of leather, over which is a plain cuirass, long high russet boots, á la Cromwell, buff trunks, plain trooper's steel helmet.

MABEL.—The fanciful dress of a maiden of England in the olden time, sugar-loaf hat, and much trimming of point lace, apron ditto, blue clocked stockings, shoes, neat buckles.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; D. F. *Door in Flat*; R. D. *Right Door*; L. D. *Left Door*; S. E. *Second Entrance*; U. E. *Upper Entrance*; M. D. *Middle Door*; L. U. E. *Left Upper Entrance*; R. U. E. *Right Upper Entrance*; L. S. E. *Left Second Entrance*; P. S. *Prompt Side*; O. P. *Opposite Prompt*.

RELATIVE POSITIONS.—R. means *Right*; L. *Left*; C. *Centre*; RC., *Right of Centre*; L.C. *Left of Centre*.

R.

RC.

C

LC.

L.

. The Reader is supposed to be on the Stage, facing the Audience.

A CLOSE SIEGE.

SCENE.—*The Interior of Mabel's Cottage in the suburbs of that part of Lichfield called, "The Close." At the back is a long Gothic Window, through which is seen the River, and beyond that, the City itself, on which the Sun is setting. On R. H. is the entrance door, and nearer to the audience, a smaller, leading to an inner chamber. On L. H. a short staircase conducting to bedroom above.*

Enter MABEL, she is running, and almost exhausted—she instantly bolts the door.

Mab. Fortune be praised! I have once more cseaped him—and so far as I had got ahead in our race, I even doubt whether he saw at which door I entered. It is really hard to be hunted in this manner by a young, good-for-nothing, good-looking fellow, who positively for the last ten days seems to have nothing to do but to run after me wherever I go. I wonder who he is? That he is an officer, a Royalist, and one of high rank, too, is clear from his uniform; and that only makes the danger ten times greater for me; for with my Gilbert's hatred to all the party, I should be for ever ruined in his opinion if he were to see me but speaking to one of them—and he, too, so jealous, and so passionate; but at any rate I think I am safe for this once. *(The latch of the door is tried.)* No, as I live, my tormentor has seen me—the door, however, is fortunately fast.

Stanhope. *(Jumping in at the casement.)* But the window is most favourably open. Pray excuse me, and the moment I can recover sufficient breath, I'll make every apology due from a gentleman.

Mab. A gentleman, sir, would never have placed himself in the situation to make such an apology necessary.

Stan. Wouldn't he indeed? Then I tell you what, my dear. He must be a gentleman of remarkably little taste. I thank my stars that is an accusation which cannot be brought against me.

Mab. If that cannot, others can—and of a much graver nature, too. Why am I followed in this way?

Stan. Why? Consult your mirror, my love, and a little reflection will tell you. But, come—let us not waste the precious moments in bandying idle words: there is matter of more consequence to occupy us.

Mab. There is, indeed—this is no time for fooling. The whole city is in an uproar.

Stan. Aye, and has been for some days, but despite their brawling, it's my belief the slaves searee know what they want.

Mab. If they are slaves, it may be that they seek their liberty!

Stan. Liberty! They have far too much of that already, for what we do not give them they are apt enough to take. But that concerns not you or me—they are of the City—we of the Close; and as regards each other, I can but wish that we were ever so. *(Approaching her.)*

Mab. Stand off, sir! If as a man, and a soldier, you have no feeling for me—a woman, and for the moment an unprotected one—at least let me claim that which in this country is said to be the right of the lowest as well as of the highest. This is my house, sir!

Stan. So I have this day, for the first time, learned. But how unfit a house for such a tenant.

Mab. It is much more unfit for such a visitor.

Stan. Come, then, with me to one which I shall provide, and thus will both objections be at once removed. *(Approaching her again.)*

Mab. Once more I say—stand off!

Stan. And why? Is there anything about me that makes my attentions disagreeable?

Mab. Nothing—at least to those who are free alike by their station and circumstances to receive them. For me—besides that my rank in life is so far beneath your own as of itself to bar all such intercourse between us—there is yet another, and perhaps a stronger reason against it.

Stan. And what may that be?

Mab. I am already affianced to another.

Stan. Another, indeed! What other?—doubtless one of those ignorant clods who makes it his pastime to vilify us of the better order, of whom he knows nothing.

Mab. And can you wonder that ignorance should follow the example which education thus sets it, by a foul abuse of one that is unknown to it? The man whom you have so unceremoniously slandered is an English yeoman—plain——

Stan. Aye, plain enough, I warrant him.

Mab. Your jest, sir, savours more of triteness than of truth; and more it may be of vanity than either.

Stan. On my conscience, you were cut out for a soldier's mistress. It requires some courage thus to attack a present enemy.

Mab. It requires more to defend an absent friend.

Stan. A friend, indeed! A rustic clown—a low-born hind, who, when you have been to church with him, will lodge you in some hovel, and give you for your sole recreation the light of his countenance to gaze at. Ha, ha!

Mab. An honest hovel would suit me better than

a cozener's castle. Nor could I be soon weary of looking at that face the sight of which called no blush into my own.

Stan. A sentiment that would do honour to any reverend father, or superannuated gossip, but which is sadly out of place coming from youth and beauty. (*Aside.*) It seems I must essay another fashion here. (*Aloud.*) However, if I have been guilty of aught to offend you, fair one, I am truly grieved—I cannot say more.

Mab. And need not say so much.

Stan. I am forgiven, then.

Mab. Freely. And now let me entreat you to leave me. Nay, I speak more in care for you even than myself. Gilbert Arkwright, he of whom I spoke but now, will probably soon be here; and even if he comes not, my dwelling stands so near the confines of the Close that I am every moment liable to visits from those of the City party, to whom you Royalists are just now objects of the direst haste.

Stan. Oh, yes—a murrain on them all!

Mab. Nay, not all. There is one among them—

Stan. Yes, Mr. Gilbert Arkwright; but that one, or I am much deceived, I have cause to curse more than all the rest.

Mab. Then for my sake be generous, and forbear.

Stan. For your sake, indeed, I could both bear and forbear. (*Trumpet heard.*) But hark! that trumpet summons me hence. I must begone; and in the present state of things it may belong—very long before I see you again. You will say farewell?

Mab. With all my heart, if I may depend on your not returning.

Stan. I promise it, and my word is my law; but we shall meet some time—

Mab. We could not do so but for harm to both. Farewell for ever!

Stan. Your hand, at least at parting.

(*She gives her hand somewhat reluctantly, which he kisses ardently.*)

Mab. (*Struggling to withdraw it.*) Nay—nay, this is not fair!

Stan. Oh, yes, it is as fair as that which is most fair on earth—your sweet self!

(*He attempts to put his arm round her waist—she breaks quickly from him*)

Mab. I have been much deceived!

Stan. (*Aside.*) And must be more so. (*Trumpet sounds.*) But not just now. (*Aloud.*) Farewell, and do not quite forget me!

[*Exit hastily.*]

Mab. I do not quite know that I can, but I must whether I can or not; and for the sake of my poor Gilbert, so I will. (*Re-enter GEORGE STAN-HOPE in great haste—he bolts the door.*) Ah! returned! I thought your word was your law. What makes you here again?

Stan. That which has no law: necessity. I had not advanced two steps from your door, when I saw— (*Aside.*) What shall I say? I must not betray my father.

Mab. Whom saw you? One that you know?

Stan. (*Aside.*) I have it. I'll take advantage of his disguise. (*Aloud.*) One of the City party, who can have no good feeling for me.

Mab. (*Aside.*) If it should be Gilbert! (*Aloud.*) You were right to avoid him, but pray do not stay here.

Stan. But without being seen by him, by what means can I leave your house?

Mab. (*Pointing to the window.*) By the same means as you used to enter it. Once in the road, turn short to the left, and you are out of his sight. (*A loud knock at the door.*) It is he! Pray, pray, begone!

Stan. Well, a single kiss and I will.

Mab. Never!

Stan. You won't give me one? Then I must take two. (*Kisses her violently.*)

Mab. Monster! and I daren't scream.

(*Knoocking again.*)

Stan. And if you did, it's no use, for I'm gone.

(*Jumps down and disappears.*)

Earl Chesterfield. (*Without.*) Open the door—I command it!

Mab. Well, I'm sure; but it is not Gilbert's voice. (*She opens the door.*)

Chesterfield. (*Entering, and in the disguise of a peasant.*) Thanks! But you might have used more haste in giving me admittance.

Mab. And you, more courtesy in asking it.

Ches. True, I might; but my business so pressed, that for the moment I forgot myself. (*Aside.*) I may at any rate say that with perfect truth.

Mab. And now that you seem to have recollected yourself again, pray what may be your business with me?

Ches. With you personally very little, but much with one who is too much here.

Mab. Whom mean you? I live alone, and am visited but by one—

Ches. It is precisely of that one I speak.

Mab. Indeed! He has, however, I should think, little need to ask your permission for what he does.

Ches. (*Somewhat sharply.*) Oh, you should think that? (*Aside.*) But I am forgetting myself again. (*Aloud.*) Then you know the young man well?

Mab. Know him well? Of course I do!

Ches. (*Aside.*) Of course she does! Well done effrontery. (*Aloud.*) I suppose, then, that you are also aware that he has a father?

Mab. Oh, yes, he often talks of his governor, as he calls him.

Ches. (*Aside.*) As he calls him! Is it possible that he can have told her his real rank? (*Aloud.*) So he speaks to you of his father always as the governor.

Mab. No, I don't say always, but he very often does; and a shocking person he seems to be.

Ches. What do you mean by a shocking person?

Mab. Why, a horrid, disagreeable old man!

Ches. Indeed! Did you ever happen to see him?

Mab. No, and I hope I never shall—at least, till we are married.

Ches. (*Startled.*) Married!

Mab. Yes, if it hadn't been for the old cross-patch, we should have been man and wife long ago.

Ches. The devil you would!

Mab. Ah, so my dear G. has said many and many's the time.

Ches. Your dear G.! Well, come, that's tolerably familiar.

Mab. Familiar? Not at all, situated as we are even before marriage; and I have promised that whenever he is in a good temper, I shall call him so after he is my husband; and that would not be

long first, if that crabbed old fellow would only give his consent—but he won't.

Ches. Won't he, indeed? Then, of course, he has been asked?

Mab. Oh, yes—a hundred times!

Ches. You are sure of that?

Mab. Quite, because my dear G. tells me so.

Ches. Oh, your dear G. tells you so. (*Aside.*) Ah, the old story trumped up to keep her quiet! (*Aloud.*) And in the meantime he often comes to visit you?

Mab. Yes, nearly every day—that is, whenever he can get away from his soldiering duty; but this horrid quarrelling and fighting between the inhabitants of the City and the Close keeps him a great deal too much from me, poor fellow!

Ches. Poor fellow! Pooh, pooh, about poor fellow! I tell you he is a disobedient, dissipated young dog, and he is deceiving his father on one side, and you on the other.

Mab. And if he is, I think that's rather more my business than yours.

Ches. And I think it's pretty even between us.

Mab. And how, pray?

Ches. (*Recollecting himself.*) How? Oh, why, because I know his father very well—he is my friend.

Mab. Is he? Then the next time you see him, give him my compliments, and tell him that he may be a very good soldier—

Ches. Well, I believe he is reckoned a tolerable one.

Mab. But he is an unjust man.

Ches. Well, I never heard him accused of that before.

Mab. And a hard-hearted father.

Ches. No, that I'll be damned if he is!

Mab. Then why don't he let me go and see him?

Ches. Hey! Why, I think there are reasons against that.

Mab. Because, I suppose, he is afraid of those about him.

Ches. Why, yes, that may be one cause.

Mab. Then why don't he come here and see me? But I suppose he thinks I should reproach him.

Ches. And should you?

Mab. No, that I wouldn't. I'd say and do everything I could to please him.

Ches. (*Approaching.*) No—would you though?

Mab. Aye, and love him!

Ches. No, you couldn't love him?

(*Going nearer to her.*)

Mab. Oh, yes, I could, for his son's sake!

Ches. (*Disappointed.*) For his son's sake! But what would you do for his own?—tell me that.

Mab. Oh, let him come and see.

Ches. (*Approaching.*) And supposing he were come!

Mab. Supposing he were?

Ches. Aye, if I now were he?

(*Going quite close to her again, and taking both her hands.*)

Mab. Why, if you were he—I'd coax you—

Ches. Aye!

Mab. And kiss you!

Ches. Aye—aye—

(*Putting his face close to hers.*)

Mab. But you aren't, you know—(*Withdrawing quickly*)—And so it's no use talking about it.

Ches. Yes, but I— (*After a struggle with himself.*) No, you're right,—(*Aside*)—and I was very near being quite wrong. By Jove, she is a delicious

creature, and I don't at all wonder at the young rascal doing just what his father would have done at his age!

Mab. And now, if you have said all you have to say, I suppose you will be for returning? You can, few of you, be spared just now I fancy.

Ches. No: affairs are, indeed, coming to a crisis.

Mab. Yes, so my dear G. has told me; and that's another reason why he is so much away—his party require him.

Ches. Why, yes, he is of some consequence to them.

Mab. And his old father of still more. He often says to me—"Bless you, we could do nothing without the governor."

Ches. True; and therefore the governor seldom leaves his post—nor should the governor's son; but instead of that, he wastes his time running after you: you can't deny the fact!

Mab. And have I denied it? On the contrary, I tell you that he has been here this very day.

Ches. He has?

Mab. Yes; and moreover, he will be here again anon—at least, so he said, though most likely for a few minutes only.

Ches. (*Aside.*) Will he? Then I'll to headquarters, and dispatch a party who shall catch him in the very fact, and bring him at once before me. (*Aloud.*) Well, good-bye, you needn't tell all I have said to young scapegrace!

Mab. Scapegrace, indeed! No, nor you needn't repeat all I have said to old Crosspatch!

Ches. Crosspatch, quotha! but we'll talk about that another time. Strict he may be, and even severe now and then, when duty requires it; but I know him better than you do, and I say he is not a crosspatch. I'll be damned if he's a crosspatch;

[*Exit.*]

Mab. Well, he is an odd sort of a person that, to be sure, but I think there is some good about him too: only for a stranger he certainly takes a little too much upon himself now and then. And now I'll sit down, and until my dear G. comes, I'll amuse myself as well as I can with my work, and my last new ballad; but after all it is but poor pastime singing to amuse only oneself.

SONG.—MABEL. (*Introduced.*)

(*While she is singing the second verse, GILBERT, in the armour of the time, opens the door gently, and stealing on, stands unperceived listening to her, until suddenly at the last words, she turns, and seeing his figure, she is for the moment alarmed.*)

Gil. Why, Mabel, lass, you ain't going to be frightened at the sight of me?

Mab. No, that I ain't, now I know it is you; but just at such a moment to come upon me, and in such a dress, too—

Gil. Dress! What is there amiss about the dress? Think ye not it becomes me?

Mab. Oh, yes, I don't say that. But you are armed, as the soldiers say, to the very teeth.

Gil. And time I was.

Mab. But what for?

Gil. To rescue my country from a tyrant, and her sons from slavery.

Mab. I'm sure if I were you I wouldn't do any such thing. I'd leave my country to take care of her own sons. (*Going up to him, taking his arm.*) You'll have quite enough to do to take care of one of her daughters.

Gil. Don't be alarmed—I mean to do so: and there's someone else, too, that I mean to take care of.

Mab. Who, pray?

Gil. Who? Why that young sprig of fashion, that I am told is always dogging you at the heels. It's plaguy hard that I can at no such moment come across him. By my faith, if I do, he shan't ask or need me to do it a second time.

Mab. Why, surely you wouldn't—

Gil. Wouldn't what? Are you grieved that I threaten the minion?

Mab. No: if I grieve, 'tis only to think you would risk your life.

Gil. Risk my life—in a tilt with such a powder-puff as that? If that's all your cause of alarm, you may make your mind easy.

Mab. But if he be not your match, there are others of his party who may be.

Gil. So much the better. There is nothing my heart yearns for so ardently as a good bout, hand to hand, and foot to foot, with two or three of these military maccaronis—these capering, curled cavaliers! What are they but so many high-bred hounds, whose sport is to hunt down us true sons of the soil, as though we were born to be but their lawful game.—Hark ye—this very day our gallant leaders, Brooke and Gell, commence operations by an attack upon the Cathedral Close, which is defended only by the old Earl of Chesterfield, his stripling son, and some three hundred of their retainers. Oh, I am impatient till the fight begins, and long to be in the thickest of it, as a famished tiger longs for his prey.

Mab. Gilbert—Gilbert, you promised me but yesterday that you would not give way to these fits of passion.

Gil. And what's the worth of such a promise?

Mab. Why not much, as it seems.

Gil. I'll tell you how much. It is as if I were to promise not to eat, or drink, or sleep, or breathe—for if I keep my word, I die.

Mab. Well, e'en as you please—I will not again interrupt you.

Gil. And if you do not, nobody else shall! (*Knocking at D. F.*) Hey? Someone seems disposed to do it already. Who is it, think ye?

Mab. (*Trembling.*) Nay, I know not.

Gil. You know not? Why art afraid, then? (*Aside.*) Ha! if it should be the young spark—

Mab. (*Aside.*) Surely it cannot be he again!

(*Aloud.*) Shall I open the door? (*Going.*)

Gil. (*Aside.*) Her anxiety convinces me it is! (*Aloud.*) No—it is better that I do.

Mab. Whoever it is, you will, I am sure—

(*Knocking again.*)

Gil. Be civil, of course—and humble, as I ought. But harkye, Mabel—retire you to your room. Nay, I insist—(*Forcing her along.*) These are no times to mineer matters, and in this case might must be right.

(*He puts her up the stairs, and opens the door.*)

Mab. Gilbert, for the last time—remember.

[*Exit into room.*]

Gil. Oh, fear me not; I will be cautious—in this—(*Locking the door*)—among the rest. And now, as I suppose, for my gallant. (*He opens the door.*)

LIEUTENANT EVERARD and Four Soldiers enter.) Ha! surprised!

(*He attempts to draw his sword.*)

Eve. (*Rushing on him on one side, and the soldiers seizing him, at the same time he tears his sword from him.*) And disarmed!

Gil. Slaves! villains!

Eve. Harkye, young man. My orders were to bring you before the Governor without violence, if you used none—but, in any case, to bring you. I have now only done what your own movement made necessary, and I will, if you offer no further resistance, in no way molest you.

Gil. You molest me? Give me my sword again—let me have the fair use of it, and I defy you, or half a dozen like you, to molest me.

Eve. Go to—you are a braggart!

Gil. And you a ruffian!

Eve. One more such word as that, and I will give you your sword; but it shall be through your rebel body.

Gil. Aye, do. Do attack an unarmed man. That's about your valour's mark, I take it.

Eve. What! I must do the hangman's work, must I?

Gil. Yes; and so disgrace the calling for ever—coward!

Eve. Ha!

(*He rushes at him with the drawn sword—at that moment GEORGE STANHOPE enters.*)

Stan. Hold!

Eve. By whose command?

Stan. By one whom you must obey.

Eve. On common occasions, I know it well, captain; but I am here specially employed.

Gil. Aye, specially, and most fitly as it seems, to do an assassin's work.

Eve. (*Threatening.*) Again!

Stan. Nay—(*Holding him*)—You would not surely, for a few bitter words, draw on a defenceless man?

Gil. Oh, would he not? Although he knows you, it's quite clear that you are poorly acquainted with him.

Stan. On the contrary, I know him well for as brave a soldier as ever buckled on steel. Come, tell me, came you hither by order of the Governor?

Eve. I did.

Stan. And your orders were—

Eve. To apprehend a young soldier whom I shall find in this house, and bring him—if possible, without violence—at once to head-quarters.

Stan. Indeed! (*After a moment's reflection—aside.*) It must be so. I am the intended culprit! But who can this be who was so nearly taking my place? (*Aloud.*) Lieutenant, allow me a moment's parley with your prisoner. (*Lieutenant Everard bows, and retires with the Soldiers to the back.*) And you, my friend, dwell you here?

Gil. By what right do you ask?

Stan. By that which nature gives us all—the right to serve one another whenever we can.

Gil. You speak fairly, though you are a Royalist.

Stan. Aye, try to do the same, though you are a Republican.

Gil. Well, I do not exactly dwell here myself.

Stan. Although you well know one that does—

Gil. (*Quickly.*) Do you?

Stan. Nay, I said not that. (*To himself.*) This must be the plain English yeoman of whom my charmer spoke to-day, and whom she has the bad

taste to prefer to me. (To Gilbert.) One word more—I am speaking to Gilbert Arkwright, am I not?

Gil. I am neither afraid nor ashamed of my name; but whoever you are, it is clear you know me—why, therefore, ask useless questions?

Stan. For the pleasure of having agreeable answers. (Aside.) It is he! Well, if I cannot be a successful wooer, I will in all cases be an honourable one, and take no base advantage of the power which chance has thus given me over my rival. On the contrary, I will myself set him free. (Aloud to Gilbert.) Hark ye! you do not think to find in me a friend?

Gil. Not in you, nor in any of your accursed party!

Stan. To find a friend in any one is hard for him who is his own enemy. But I will serve you in spite of yourself.

Gil. You have served me already, and I acknowledge it, don't I?

Stan. In the very handsomest manner, I must say. But never mind that. You would return to the city?

Gil. I would, and you—

Stan. To the Close. (Taking out tablets—he writes.) Lieutenant Everard—

Eve. (Advances.) Captain—

Stan. You will be good enough to leave your prisoner in my charge, and give this note to the Governor.

Eve. You will, then, bear me harmless?

Stan. I have taken care therein to do so.

Eve. And the men—

Stan. You will take with you.

Eve. Captain, you are a young soldier, and not accustomed to command.

Stan. (Good-humouredly.) Lieutenant, you are an old soldier, and quite accustomed to obey.

Eve. Enough, captain. (To the men.) Left face! march!

[Exit, followed by the Soldiers.]

Stan. (Aside.) Now if I could but get rid of him! (Aloud.) Well, they are gone at last.

Gil. Yes, they are.

Stan. (After a pause.) Perhaps you will like to follow?

Gil. Oh, I have no sort of objection! (Aside.) Provided I don't leave you behind.

Stan. (Aside, after a pause.) I wonder why the deuce he don't start!

Gil. (Apart.) I can't conceive what he's staying for!

Stan. I thought you said you would go?

Gil. I did.

Stan. Then why don't you?

Gil. So I will.

Stan. But when?

Gil. Now.

Stan. Good bye, then!

Gil. Good bye to you if you're going!

Stan. No; I said it because I thought you were going.

Gil. Oh!

Stan. Ah!

Gil. (Aside.) I can't leave the house until I have unlocked Mabel's door!

Stan. (Aside.) Well, I have stood this as long as I can; I must now speak to the point. (Aloud.) Did you or did you not just now say that you were ready to follow?

Gil. I did; but I can't follow without you lead, you know.

Stan. Oh, that's it! Why didn't you say so at once? (Aside.) I must go—but I'll pretty soon get rid of him and return.

Gil. (Aside.) I can't help starting with him, but I won't be long before I give him the slip, and come back.

Stan. (Aloud.) Come, then—I'm off!

(Turning round, and going towards the door.)

Gil. And I—

(The moment the other's back is turned, he makes a dart to Mabel's door, and unlocks it.)

Stan. (Seeing him.) Hallo! that's not the door!

Gil. (Turning sharply the other way.) No, but this is.

Stan. And hard work we've both of us had to find it!

[Exeunt. As soon as they are gone, Mabel puts her head out at the door.]

Mab. At length I am free again! What a headstrong, hair-brained fellow is that lover of mine—and what a kind and generous youth is he who might have sacrificed, yet rather chose to save, a formidable rival. Ah, some great and grand lady may think herself fortunate when she calls him husband. Heigho! Well, it's no use my wasting my time in thinking of such matters, and so in the first place, I'll make my door fast.

(As she approaches to do so, the EARL OF CHESTERFIELD enters, still disguised.)

Ches. Not quite so fast as you think, my fair one, seeing that I must have a few words with you first.

Mab. So, you are here again, hey?

Ches. Yes; and this time, as I hope, to some purpose; for very little good seems to have come from my last visit.

Mab. Why, what good did you expect?

Ches. That which one way or the other must and shall be accomplished.

Mab. Well, I'm sure! you speak like a very positive old man!

Ches. Then I speak like what I am—as you will know when you learn who I am. I endeavoured when we met before to persuade you that you ought to give up an acquaintance.

Mab. Which I endeavoured to persuade you that I never would.

Ches. Well, then, I must go another way to work. You have admitted to me your perfect knowledge that the father of your lover, or whatever else you choose to style him, is thoroughly opposed to the connection.

Mab. Opposed? Oh, yes; I know that.

Ches. As, indeed, it is most natural he should be.

Mab. Natural? Oh, no; I do not know that at all.

Ches. Well, if you don't, I do, and that's enough.

Mab. You do?

Ches. Yes, I do; I, who—but never mind about me, just now.

Mab. Oh, bless you, I don't mind about you, in the least—because if I think the match a proper one, and my dear G. thinks so too—

Ches. Your dear G. indeed! But suppose we should have other views for him?

Mab. What, you mean to marry him to some one else? Try, that's all—I give you leave.

Ches. Oh, you give me leave, do you? That's very civil, upon my word! And suppose I were to take leave?

Mab. (*Curtseying and pointing to the door.*) You couldn't oblige me more.

Ches. Well, that is not very civil! But we are wasting time. I came here in the best feeling—

Mab. Oh, that I think's very clear!

Ches. You'll find it so before we part. I say I came here in the best feeling, to give you a little information. Mabel, you are, I believe, a very good girl.

Mab. Thank ye.

Ches. You are, I know, a very pretty one.

Mab. Thank ye—thank ye.

Ches. Now, on both those accounts would I do you a service, if I could. You are resolved, you say, on continuing this connection?

Mab. I have told you so over and over again.

Ches. Yes, you have, certainly; but I have good reason to think that your principal motive for so doing is your conviction that your dear G., as you call him, intends to marry you—that, at least, is your belief?

Mab. My belief?—my certainty?

Ches. And that, notwithstanding his father's prohibition?

Mab. Oh, his father may relent.

Ches. Never—never! He has sworn it by every oath that is binding.

Mab. Then, as I have said before, he is a cross-patch—nay, he's worse than that—he's a brute and a monster! But he'll be rewarded for it here or hereafter. Besides, he can't live for ever—he's getting pretty old.

Ches. No he an't

Mab. Ah, but I know he is—though I never saw him. His legs are weak, and his body's bent—at least, so they tell me.

Ches. Do they? Then they tell you—what I shan't mention. But take this from me, who ought to know, and who does know—he is as strong on his legs as he is in his head, and his body, far from being bent, is like his mind, and every action of it as upright as a nobleman's should be.

Mab. A nobleman! Ha, ha! You must be a good judge of that, certainly!

Ches. (*Aside.*) I should think so! (*Aloud.*) But to return to our affair. Although your lover's father will not, and cannot consent to the continuance of this connection, yet you shall find that he is anything but ill disposed towards you. He has lately seen you more than once—has learned much about you; and, far from being your enemy, he is deeply interested for you, and is strongly inclined to be your friend. To prove this, he sends you by me this purse, which you will find not unworthy your acceptance. (*Gives purse.*)

Mab. (*Taking it slowly.*) No! did he send that? I am sorry that I used such hard words towards him.

Ches. Oh, think not of that: he will never know the fact more than he does now. But with this earnest of his good feeling for you he sends you also another, which you ought, to receive as a still stronger—this fact—known to him beyond the possibility of a doubt—your lover, whatever he may have sworn to you to the contrary, has never even mentioned your name to his father, nor under any circumstances will he ever make you his wife.

Mab. (*After a pause, flings down the purse.*) Take back your gold; which, now I see your drift, I spurn as I do you, and him that sent you!

(*Crosses to R.*)

Chas. (*Proudly.*) I will—(*He picks it up.*)—and reserve it for those who better deserve it. This, then, is your answer.

Mab. It is; given with all the scorn that such a proposition merits. Take it, and depart with it, thankful for the absence of one from whose anger you would not so easily have escaped!

Ches. What! Am I threatened as well as defied? Menaced with violence, and that, too, from my own son?

Mab. Your son? Your son!

Ches. Yes; for now I will no longer hide the truth. I am the youth's father. I have for some time heard of his love for you; I therefore came to-day, in disguise I own, to ascertain the truth of it; but when I heard you speak of protestations on his part which I, his father, best knew were as false in fact as they were base in intention, my mind was instantly made up to save him, the seducer, from crime, and you, the victim, from dishonour. I sent a guard to seize him here; but on my way hither to meet them, I learned that my purpose had been defeated by some means not yet quite clear to me. I determined at all risks to come on, and tell you all. How I have sped, I need not say.

Mab. And you are his father? And you know what you have stated to be the truth?

Ches. The solemn and the sacred truth. But you shall yet be saved—saved in spite of him—ay, in spite of yourself! you shall, if it cost me half my fortune; nay, if it cost me half my happiness—my own son's affections. And when I have placed you beyond the reach of danger, or even of temptation, you shall again look me in the face, and tell me, as you did but now, that I am a cross-patch—and worse than that—a brute and a monster!

Mab. Oh, can you forgive me?

Ches. I'll try at any rate; and I shouldn't be at all surprised if I succeeded.

Mab. I can scarcely do so much for myself. But, hark! I hear some one coming. I must speak further with you. Will you oblige me by remaining a few minutes concealed? I have a reason—

Ches. Well, it must not be for a great while, for I have already been too long absent.

Mab. It shall not. But, quick—quick!

(*Opening door of Cabinet, R. H.*)

Ches. Stay! you don't recollect my weak legs, and my poor bent body—aha!

Mab. Hush! (*She closes the door upon him.*) And now, Mr. Gilbert—

Enter GEORGE STANHOPE, gently.

Stan. Ten thousand pardons! May I enter—only for a moment?

Mab. Why do you doubt it?

Stan. (*Coming forward.*) Because—because I thought when I first caught your eyes, that you looked so very angry—

Mab. If I did, it was not with you, believe me.

Stan. Not with me! (*Aside.*) I'm in better odour, seemingly. (*Aloud.*) But you did tell me, you know, that I must not return.

Mab. Ay; but things have greatly changed since then—(*Aside*)—and persons too, I fear!

Stan. (*Aside.*) The deuce they have! What's in

the wind now, I wonder? (*Aloud.*) Then my visit is less unwelcome than it was.

Mab. Much. (*Aside.*) I may say that, at any rate.

Stan. I am delighted! (*Aside.*) But I need not be; for I suppose it's only because she has heard of my care of her rustie lover. (*Aloud.*) And my rival—

Mab. I don't know that you have one. (*Aside.*) I'm determined to be even with Mr. Gilbert!

Stan. Not know that I have one! (*Aside.*) Oh! why can I have already put him out of the field?

Mab. And if you had a rival, I should think, with your advantages, you would have little to fear.

Stan. Indeed! (*Aside.*) Well, this is the most extraordinary change! But impudence does go an immense way with women, that's certain! (*Aloud, advancing quickly to her.*) Why, then, I see—

(*Stopping suddenly, as his eye rests on some object out of window, to which he approaches one or two steps.*)

Mab. (*Astonished.*) What do you see?

Stan. Something very different from her of whom I was going to speak. A set of hideous wretches—

Mab. And coming this way! What's to be done?

Stan. Why, I am as they think—but I rather think not. You must conceal me—

Mab. But where?

Stan. Here! (*Going towards cabinet.*)

Mab. No, not there!

Stan. Well, here, then!

Mab. Nay, that is my bedroom!

Stan. So much the better; for if they are in search of me I am safe, seeing that fools never think of looking for rogues—(*Aside*)—where they are most likely to be found.

[*Exit in room.*]

Mab. (*Still looking out.*) It is as I thought—Gilbert himself, and with him a party of the citizens. Armed, too! Well, let him come—with his father here, I have little to fear; and I will at least let him know that I am not quite the simpleton he seems so long to have reckoned me.

GILBERT, carrying an axe, and his Followers, who have passed the window, now enter.

Gil. Now, Mabel—

Mab. And now, Gilbert—

Gil. (*Surprised at her manner.*) Hey! (*Aside.*) Ah, she is, I suppose a little annoyed at my leaving the house so abruptly just now. Poor thing! she does not know that I couldn't help myself. (*Aloud.*) I know you have some little cause to be displeased.

Mab. Do you?

Gil. But it shall not occur again, I'll take care of that.

Mab. Perhaps I may save you the trouble.

Gil. No, no; I am the proper person to do it, and I will do it, or rather, I have done it. In the present state of affairs, it is clear that this dwelling, so near the confines of the Close, is not the fit place for you. I have long thought so, but the ruffian attack made upon it to-day—

Mab. You call that a ruffian attack, do you?

Gil. Why, of course I do—don't you?

Mab. Never mind what I call it—pray go on.

Gil. (*Getting angry.*) Whatever you or I, or any one may call it, I'll prevent its happening a second time. It is therefore I have brought this time those that, with me, will see you safely lodged in the city.

Mab. And suppose I decline the offer? I may be, after all, less in danger from open enemies than from treacherous friends.

Gil. Mabel! those words to me! What mean you?

Mab. That I don't intend to quit this place except with one person.

Gil. And who is he?

Mab. Your father!

Gil. That is idle, for he cannot come to you. But even that wish on your part, as far as I could I have anticipated, for I have this very hour made so strong an appeal to him in your behalf that he has consented to receive you under his roof. What reply make you to this?

Mab. Oh, my reply is brief, but to the purpose. Your assertion is like yourself—utterly false!

Gil. Mabel! you are the first human being that ever dared to say so, or even to think so of me! Who is your informer?

Mab. You dare not face him!

Gil. Put me to the proof.

Mab. I will, and sooner than you look for. (*She throws open the door of the Cabinet—EARL CHESTERFIELD enters.*) There!

Gil. And who, pray, have we here?

Mab. Oh, this is too much! What! pretend not to know your own father?

Gil. My father? Does he dare to call himself so? I'll tear the lie from his villain throat! (*He rushes at the Earl, and tearing open his disguise, discovers his rich dress beneath.*) Ha! that dress!—a Royalist, and—No, it cannot be! By Heaven, but it is, though, for I know him by the coronet on his sword and on his silver horn. (*Snatching them from him, and giving the sword to one of his followers.*) Come, let us see if the proud instrument will for once respond to plebeian lips, while I sound a welcome on it to the Governor of Lichfield Close, the Earl of Chesterfield!

(*He sounds a loud blast.*)

Ches. One moment only. I am in your power, and you must do as you will with me, but I pledge my honour as a peer—(*they laugh*)—nay, then, as a man—that I came not as a spy, neither did I dream of passing myself for your father. There is some strange mistake, of which, it seems, I am the victim; but I am a soldier, and ask only to be treated as one.

Gil. You shall be treated as the slave you would make of me and all that fall in your clutches!

Stan. (*Hastily opens the door of the room where he was concealed, and making one bound on to the stage.*) Never, while I have life to defend him!

(*Two or three go behind him, and after a slight struggle disarm him.*)

Gil. (*Hearing his voice, but not seeing who it is.*) Ha! what, have we a rat in every corner? (*He seizes an axe from one of the men nearest, and rushes at Stanhope.*) But I'll soon bane the house. (*Mabel strives to stop him, but he puts her away—when at the moment he is about to strike, he recognises him, and instantly lets fall the weapon.*) What, my preserver! Come, life for life is fair—pass you free. I now pledge myself for your safety!

Stan. Not without my father bears me company.

Mab. His father! So, then, the mystery is cleared.

Gil. What mystery? Know you this stripling? You do—he was concealed in your room. My mind misgives me. Is this he that has dared—but answer me not, I know it is, and I revoke—No, no, I cannot do that—you are safe—I have pledged my word.

Mab. My brave Gilbert! all can be explained, but till then trust to my word of honour. I have never loved but you, and I am yours for ever!

Gil. Then I am content.

(Murmurs of discontent among the party, and one voice cries, "But we're not; this is nothing to us!"—and another—"No, no; they are our prisoners! Seize them—seize them!")

Gil. What! do you dare to speak?

Voices. Aye, aye—and to act!

Gil. Then, as I live—(Preparing to rush upon them.) But I am unarmed.

Voice. And so are you all. Surrender!

Gil.

Ches. } Never!

Stan. }

Voices. Down with them, then!

(They advance upon them with their different weapons. At that moment the door is burst open, and LIEU-

TENANT EVERARD enters with a large party of the Royalists, others appearing at the window, and levelling their matchlocks at the insurgents, who are speedily disarmed and thrown down.)

Stan. Victoria—Victoria! By my patron, St. George, but this is rare good fortune! Say, how came it, lieutenant?

Eve. I heard the well-known sound of the Earl's horn, and thinking he might be in need of help, I made all speed to where I knew he was.

Ches. Right well bethought, my good soldier.

Eve. I bring good news, too, with me. The Lord Brooke as he was secretly pointing the first gun against the cathedral, was seen by young Richard Dyott, and by him shot in the very act. The rebel party are in consternation at their sudden loss, and have already demanded a truce.

Gil. Ha!

Ches. Which shall be granted, that they may have time to see their errors, and amend them.

Gil. Thanks, noble Earl, you are indeed a generous enemy.

Mab. Rather say, a kind friend, for such is what you and I, and all here, just now most need. (To the audience.) Let me hope, therefore, that you will for my sake endure what I have past endured for yours—A CLOSE SIEGE.

CURTAIN.

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